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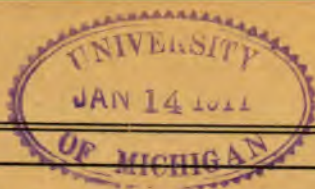
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The Des Moines Plan of Commission Government

Des Moines. Charters

DIGEST AND REFERENCES



COMPILED BY
EDWARD C. LYTTON
MAYOR'S SECRETARY



DES MOINES, IOWA
SEPTEMBER, 1910



17, 19-32

1932, 1933, 1934



New Municipal Building in course of construction on river front. The first building erected in the United States, designed especially for the business of a Commission Governed City

Digest of The Des Moines Plan

By Mayor James R. Hanna, Des Moines, Iowa

The Commission form of government abolishes ward lines, party politics and the old division of city officers into legislative, executive and judicial departments. In place of this it substitutes a board, consisting of the mayor and four commissioners, who manage the affairs of the city just as a board of directors manage the business of a bank or any large corporation, who are invested with all the powers of city government and who are elected by the people of the whole city, but without any party designation. These five men divide the duties of the city government among themselves into five departments of Public Affairs, Accounts and Finances, Public Safety, Streets and Public Improvements, and Parks and Public Property. They then elect all the subordinate officers necessary to the conducting of the city business, such as Chief of Police, Police Judge, City Clerk, City Engineer, City Treasurer, City Auditor, etc. These subordinate officers may be discharged at any time for any misconduct or lack of attention to duties. All other subordinates except common laborers are selected under civil service rules administered by a Civil Service Commission, and are removable only for misconduct or lack of attention to duties, or activity in political matters.

The four councilmen and mayor act as the administrative heads of their respective departments, and also constitute the city council and as such legislate for the city.

The councilmen under the Des Moines plan are elected for a period of two years and in the following manner:

Any citizen who can secure the signatures of twenty-five voters vouching for his character may become a candidate for mayor or commissioner. From among these candidates the two receiving the highest number of votes for mayor in the primary become candidates for mayor in the final election, and the eight receiving the highest number of votes for commissioner become the final candidates for commissioners. Then in the final election, occurring two weeks later, the one receiving the highest number of votes for mayor becomes mayor and the four receiving the highest number of votes for commissioners are elected to these offices. These five men at their first meeting proceed to elect the subordinate city officers and the new council is then ready to conduct the business of the city.

It will be seen that directness and simplicity are the main characteristics of the Des Moines plan of commission government. The great purposes are to make the city government feel responsive to public opinion and also to make it efficient in administration. To carry out these two fundamental ideas two other great principles have directed nearly all the details

of our charter, viz: to confer upon the governing body great power, and to hold the governing body strictly responsible for the right use of that power. Publicity and efficiency are thus the watchwords of the Des Moines plan.

Candidates must make a public statement of their campaign expenses, there can be no secret meetings of the city council, every ordinance appropriating money must be on public file for seven days before it becomes effective, all franchises must be submitted to a vote of the people for approval before they become operative, officers must have no secret obligations to public service companies in the way of passes, special rates, or free services, etc. These specific provisions for publicity have created a general spirit of bringing everything in connection with the city government out into the open light. Campaigns are conducted practically altogether in open meetings, hundreds of which occur in every city election. Every meeting of the city council is minutely reported in the daily newspapers. The result is that the public opinion is well informed and intelligent, and it moulds the action of the city council, and the power of this public opinion is rendered still more effective by the existence of the provisions for the initiative, referendum and recall.

Having thus provided for intelligent, active and effective public opinion that makes the city government feel entirely responsible to it for its every act, the next thing of importance, indeed the great object, is to give the city officers every possible means of efficient administration. They are, therefore, given every power of city government, legislative, executive and judicial, so that they can make no excuse for not doing their full duty. The result is a prompt, efficient, business-like administration of municipal affairs. That would seem to be something like the fulfillment of democracy, when you can have intelligent public opinion making itself felt in a business-like administration of public business.

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ALABAMA

*Montgomery
Birmingham*

CALIFORNIA

*Berkeley
Los Angeles
Riverside
San Diego*

COLORADO

*Colorado Springs
Grand Junction*

GEORGIA

Atlanta (under consideration)

IOWA

*Des Moines
Cedar Rapids
Keokuk
Burlington
Sioux City
Fort Dodge*

IDAHO

*Boise
Lewiston*

KANSAS

*Kansas City
Coffeyville
Leavenworth
Wichita
Hutchinson*

Independence

*Anthony
Cherryvale
Topeka
Parsons
Pittsburg
Emporia*

LOUISIANA

Shreveport

MASSACHUSETTS

*Taunton
Haverhill
Gloucester
Chelsea
Boston (modified)*

MISSOURI

St Joseph

MINNESOTA

Mankato

NORTH DAKOTA

*Grand Forks
Fargo
Minot
Mandan
Bismark*

NEW YORK

*Buffalo
Mount Vernon*

NORTH CAROLINA

Charlotte

OKLAHOMA

Guthrie
Ardmore
Muskogee
El Reno
Tulsa
Sapulpa
Claremore
Enid
McAlister

SOUTH CAROLINA
Columbia

SOUTH DAKOTA

Yankton
Sioux Falls
Huron
Pierre
Dell Rapids
Vermillion
Rapid City

TEXAS

Galveston

Houston
Palestine
Waco
Fort Worth
Austin
El Paso
Dallas
Denison
San Antonio
Greenville
Sherman
Beaumont

TENNESSEE

Etawah
Memphis
Bristol
Clarksville
Richard City

WASHINGTON

Tacoma

WISCONSIN

Eau Claire